R4105-81.1F 12/91

The Conference Board

A Topical Report from the Consumer Research Center July 1990

Special Consumer Survey Report

Boomers Better Off Than Their Parents At The Same Age

It is fashionable among commentators on the social scene to maintain that baby boomers are not faring anywhere as well as their parents. However, the ultimate authorities on this issue, the boomers themselves, overwhelmingly reject that view. This is the finding of a Conference Board survey in which both men and women were asked to compare their present standard of living with that of their parents during the last few years when they were living at home.

About one out of every two men under age 35, and about the same proportion of women of that age, say that their standard of living is in fact higher than that of their parents, when they were still living at home. In the 35-45 age group, over two-thirds of all males and only a moderately smaller proportion of women also report that their circumstances are better. These are relatively young adults, evidently in the early stages of their careers, while their parents were still in their peak earning years when their offspring left home. As we move along in age, a much higher proportion of both men and women report that they are faring a good deal better than their parents. These are the findings of a study conducted for The Conference Board by National Family Opinion, Inc., covering a sample of some 5,000 households.

The survey results are consistent with U.S. government income statistics. The average income of today's family headed by 25-35 year-olds is some 50% higher than for the same age group thirty years ago, measured in constant dollars. Among those 35-45, the figure is some 70% higher. Clearly, baby boomers are far more affluent than their parents were at the same age.

In a second question, men and women were asked if they had greater or fewer opportunities than their parents had at the same age. On this query, too, responses were overwhelmingly positive. Three out of four young adult men, and more than four out of five young adult women believe that they have greater opportunities than their fathers and mothers respectively.

In all regions of the country, in all age groups, and within all income brackets, the majority of today's men and women feel that their standard of living and their opportunities are better than those experienced by their parents. Again, statistics validate this perception: today, about one out of every three men age 35 has a college degree, compared with less than one out of every six in their fathers' generation. For women, the gain is more impressive. One in four young women holds a college degree, compared with less than one in ten in their mothers' generation. The American Dream—despite rumors to the contrary—is alive and more ambitious than ever.

Fabian Linden

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How would you compare your present standard of living with that of your parents during the last few years that you were living at home?

	Total	Under 35	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and Over
			Male			
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Much Better	47.4	24.9	43.1	56.2	67.9	66.3
Better	22.7	24.1	25.6	22.2	15.7	22.8
Same	15.7	22.9	16.5	13.8	11.2	7.4
Not Quite As Good	11.0	22.0	11.2	5.7	3.8	2.8
Worse	3.2	6.0	3.5	2.1	1.4	0.7
			Female			
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Much Better	44.1	24.5	34.9	52.8	61.0	62.0
Better	23.5	23.4	26.1	23.6	19.9	23.5
Same	17.0	22.7	21.5	14.3	12.2	9.5
Not Quite As Good	11.1	21.8	11.8	7.0	4.7	4.0
Worse	4.2	7.7	5.6	2.3	2.1	1.0

Do you feel that you have greater or fewer opportunities today than your father/mother had when he/she was about your age?

	Total	Under 35	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and Over
			Male			
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Much Better	58.7	45.6	56.9	60.9	70.7	71.7
Better	25.6	30.5	26.6	27.6	18.6	19.7
Same	9.2	13.3	9.9	6.3	7.6	5.2
Not Quite As Good	4.9	8.6	4.9	3.8	1.5	2.5
Worse	1.6	2.0	1.7	1.3	1.7	0.9
			Female			
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Much Better	66.2	57.6	63.1	67.1	72.5	76.0
Better	23.0	29.1	25.1	22.9	19.4	15.1
Same	6.6	7.2	6.8	6.8	4.9	6.8
Not Quite As Good	3.1	4.8	3.6	2.0	2.4	1.7
Worse	1.1	1.4	1.5	1.2	0.8	0.5

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The Conference Board

A Topical Report from the Consumer Research Center October 1990

Special Consumer Survey Report

The Issues of Public Concern

The Cost of Medical Care, Drug Abuse, and Crime are regarded, by the American public, as the nation's most pressing economic and social problems. Also high on the list of concerns are Pollution, AIDS, and the Federal Budget Deficit, in that order. Smoking, Race Relations, and the Threat of Nuclear War are considered to be the least serious. These are the major findings of a Conference Board survey in which respondents were asked to assess the degree of seriousness with which they regard a list of twenty-two economic and social issues. Participants were given five response options, ranging from "Most Serious" to "Least Serious." The survey, conducted for the Conference Board by National Family Opinion, Inc., covered a representative nationwide sample of 5,000 households.

A similar survey, covering almost all of the same issues, was conducted in the Summer of 1988. Since then, there have been some fairly large changes in the public's assessment of the nation's problems. Drug Abuse and the Cost of Medical Care were also near the top of the list in the earlier study. However, in both instances, the degree of public concern is now greater. In the previous probe, about 83% of all respondents considered the Cost of Medical Care to be a serious problem, but in the most recent study 88% expressed that view. The increase in concern over Drug Abuse was almost as large.

Crime is also causing increasing anxiety. This problem has moved up from fifth place to third place on the list. In the earlier study, some 75% of all respondents regarded Crime to be a serious problem, while now 81% express that view. Pollution has moved up sharply on the list of public worries. About 80% of respondents now regard Pollution as "serious," up from only 65% two years ago. However, concern over AIDS has declined from 83% of those surveyed in 1988, to 77% now. The Federal Budget Deficit is regarded with the same degree of seriousness as in the earlier study. Both then and now, some 78% of the public considered this to be a major problem.

Age often makes a difference in how an individual assesses an issue. Persons over 55 generally worry a good deal more than younger people about the Savings & Loan Crisis, as well as the Federal Budget and Foreign Trade Deficits. Also, older people are particularly concerned about Crime and the Cost of Medical Care. These are clearly matters of considerable concern to the elderly. The relatively young, on the other hand, express substantially above-average concern about the availability of Child Care Facilities, Cost of Housing and College Education—again, issues that are important to the age group. On most issues, the young and the middle-aged worry less than those no longer young.

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There are also differences by income level. Broadly, those in the lower brackets tend to worry more than the affluent, particularly about Unemployment, the Homeless, Housing Costs, Alcoholism, Child Care, and Race Relations—matters which evidently affect their everyday life. The well-heeled express below-average concern over almost all issues included in the study, except for the Federal Budget Deficit and Education. Affluence evidently decreases the sense of vulnerability.

There are also differences in response patterns by regions of the country. The West coast appears to be least disturbed about most issues, the East coast most disturbed. The difference in the age profile between East and West may have something to do with this. People in New England and the Middle Atlantic states are more concerned than the rest of the nation about Housing Costs, Race Relations, and the Savings & Loan Crisis. Poverty, the Homeless, and AIDS, are also considered to be more serious in the Middle Atlantic states than in other areas. In the Pacific region, only Housing and Pollution are regarded with more anxiety than in other areas.

Fabian Linden

THE DEGREES OF PUBLIC CONCERN

Here are a number of economic and social issues which are causing many people conern. How would you rate the seriousness of each of these issues as ompared to the others?

	Most Serious	Survey Conducted 1990			Least Serious	Serious Concern* 1990	Serious Concern* 1988
Cost of Medical Care	63.6%	24.8%	9.1%	1.9%	0.6%	88.4%	82.7%
Drug Abuse	65.7	22.5	8.5	2.1	1.1	88.2	84.7
Crime	47.3	33.9	15.7	2.4	0.6	81.2	75.2
Pollution	49.1	30.4	15.6	3.6	1.2	79.5	65.3
Federal Budget Deficit	46.8	31.4	17.3	3.1	1.3	78.2	77.8
AIDS	55.7	21.8	13.5	5.0	4.1	77.5	82.7
Elementary Education	43.5	30.7	19.8	4.2	1.9	74.2	68.9
The Homeless	46.8	25.3	18.1	6.2	3.5	72.1	67.3
Poverty	44.6	26.2	20.0	6.1	3.1	70.8	67.0
Alcoholism	40.3	30.1	20.6	6.2	2.9	70.4	66.4
Cost of Housing	30.7	35.4	25.2	6.5	2.1	66.1	59.5
Unemployment	31.8	34.0	23.7	8.9	1.7	65.8	63.8
Foreign Trade Deficit	26.4	38.1	27.1	6.3	2.2	64.5	67.7
S & L Crisis	31.9	31.5	26.3	7.9	2.3	63.4	NA
Loss of Jobs in Mfg.	28.8	34.5	25.9	8.5	2.2	63.3	64.7
Plight of Farmers	28.2	34.6	23.7	8.8	4.8	62.8	76.1
White Collar Crime	24.7	33.1	28.6	10.1	3.6	57.8	52.0
Higher Education	23.5	31.8	30.8	9.6	4.3	55.3	52.5
Child Care Facilities	23.5	29.0	30.4	10.6	6.5	52.5	NA
Smoking	25.9	25.3	25.2	13.1	10.6	51.2	45.4
Race Relations	19.1	24.7	34.0	13.0	9.1	43.8	40.6
Threat of Nuclear War	10.9	15.1	27.1	24.0	22.9	26.0	35.6

*This measure is the proportion of respondents indicating either Most Serious (first column) or Serious (second column).

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The Conference Board

A Topical Report from the Consumer Research Center November 1990

Special Consumer Survey Report

Women's Work Is Almost Never Done—by Men

The liberation of the American woman has gone a long way in recent years—but her place, apparently, is still frequently in the kitchen. According to the findings of a recent Conference Board survey, the day-to-day housekeeping responsibilities continue to be primarily woman's work. It apparently makes only a slight difference if she is out earning a pay check. The survey, conducted for the Board by National Family Opinion, Inc., covered a representative national sample of 5,000 homes. People were asked how often the male member of the family does those household chores which traditionally have been regarded as the responsibility of the woman. Women, in turn, were asked how frequently they assumed tasks generally regarded as the male's domain.

Although the American gender revolution has been in process now for well over half a century, the woman of the house is frequently found in the kitchen. Most husbands are rarely there. Men wash the family's dishes "rarely or never," in two out of every five homes. It makes scant difference whether the wife earns a pay check.

Although it is often rumored that men make the best chefs, very few apparently practice the art at home. More than 40% of husbands almost never do the cooking. The frequency is only very slightly higher when the wife is a wage-earner. But there are signs of possible change. The baby boomer male appears to be somewhat more disposed to cook than his father.

Doing the family laundry, however, is very much another matter. Only about one out of every six husbands assume this responsibility with any reasonable degree of frequency. In working-wife families, the incidence is higher—but only barely. Younger men are slightly more likely to run the washing machine, but even they do not assume that responsibility very often. As for ironing, that is almost always a female activity.

Nor do men appear to be particularly enthusiastic about cleaning the house. Two out of every five assume that chore only "rarely or never." The fact that the wife is working does not seem to make much of a difference. However, again, the younger generation is somewhat more disposed to lend a hand than older males.

The activity in running a home which is assumed by the largest number of men is shopping for food. About one out of every three "almost always or often" buy the family groceries. In this instance, older men are more kindly disposed to visit the supermarket than younger men.

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The American husband not only gallantly leaves the routine household chores to the female, but he apparently also sometimes leaves her to assume tasks that are traditionally considered to be the responsibility of the man of the house. For example, a third of all women "almost always or often" prepare the family's income tax returns. A working wife is slightly more likely to assume this responsibility than a traditional housewife. There is very little difference by age of household head. The American housewife is the family's prime bill payer. Some 70% "almost always or often" send out the monthly checks.

The word "handyman" does not seem likely to be dropped in the foreseeable future for the term "handy person." Only 20% of women do minor repairs around the house with any high degree of frequency. Still, over a third do such work "sometimes." The figure is slightly higher among working women as compared to full-time housekeeping wives.

Painting and wall-papering also remain principally a male activity. Most women engage in such work only "sometimes" or "never." Delivering the family car to the garage for repair work is still principally the husband's activity. About half of all wives "rarely or never" assume this responsibility. The young woman is more disposed to visit the garage than her older sister. The only activity which appears to be shared equally by husband and wife is putting out the family garbage.

Fabian Linden

To what extent does the husband in the house perform each of the following household tasks?

	Almost Always	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely or Never*
Shop for Food	16.5%	16.9%	28.6%	38.0%
Wash the Dishes	9.8	20.2	31.6	38.4
Clean the House	6.3	15.3	38.3	40.1
Cook	5.8	15.7	37.2	41.4
Do the Laundry	6.2	10.9	21.3	61.6
Iron	3.5	4.0	6.6	85.9

To what extent does the wife in the house perform each of the following household tasks?

	Almost Always	*Often*	*Sometimes*	*Rarely or Never*
Pay Monthly Bills	62.5%	8.1%	10.9%	18.5%
Take Out Garbage	25.7	22.2	30.2	21.9
Paint or Wallpaper	17.1	12.4	35.4	44.3
Prepare Tax Returns	28.3	4.7	7.8	59.2
Arrange for Car Repairs	13.0	11.9	26.2	48.9
Do Minor House Repairs	8.0	12.4	35.4	44.3

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The Conference Board

A Topical Report from the Consumer Research Center December 1990

Special Consumer Survey Report

Spending Plans for Christmas 1990 Lower Than Last Year

The typical American household plans to spend about $325 on Christmas gift-giving this year—half expect to spend less, the other half more. This is estimated to add up to an aggregate consumer expenditure of somewhat over $37 billion. This sum is roughly 4 percent less than last year's estimate, which was based on an identical study. However, in assessing this year's results, it should be noted that the survey was conducted at a time when consumers were worried about the crisis in the Middle East, and concerned about pending increases in taxes resulting from the new Federal Budget. More broadly, the economy has been sluggish for some months now, and consumer confidence is a good deal lower than it was last year at this time. Still, it may be that when the Christmas lights are lit and the Carols are being sung, the gift-giving impulse will be somewhat more generous than indicated in this year's survey. Also, this year's Christmas shopping season will be slightly longer than that of last year.

The survey of Christmas spending intentions covers a representative national sample of 5,000 households. The survey was conducted in the first half of November for The Conference Board's Consumer Research Center by National Family Opinion, Inc. Among other findings:

- Slightly less than a third of all households plan to spend under $200 for Christmas gifts this year. A little bit less than half that number expect to spend less than $100, a little more than half between $100 and $200.
- Between 40 and 45 percent of all households indicate that they will spend between $200 and $500 for Christmas presents.
- About one out of every four households say that their outlays for Christmas gifts this year will exceed $500. This is a slightly smaller fraction than recorded in last year's survey.
- Still, households with intentions to spend over $500 will account for over half of total expenditures for Christmas gifts this year.
- Homes in the age class 45-54 will tend to spend more than any other age group. Relatively large outlays are also reported by those aged 35-44. These are the years in which a very high proportion of homes include children. Also, at this stage income is above average.

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- Young households, those under age 25, tend to spend less than average for gift giving but the figure increases to more than average in the 25-34 age bracket.
- At the other end of the age scale, among those over 55, spending plans for Christmas gifts are well below par.

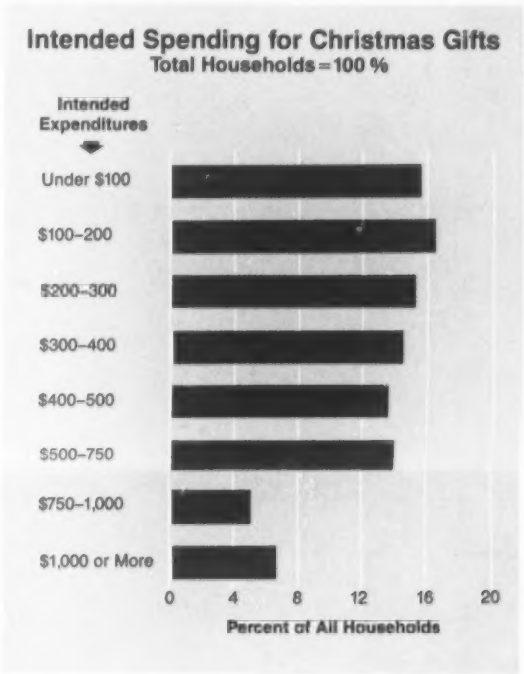
*How much will you be spending on gifts this Christmas?**

TOTAL U.S	**$325**
REGION	
Northeast	$357
Midwest	315
South	311
West	315
AGE OF HOUSEHOLD HEAD	
Under 25	$316
25-34	343
35-44	374
45-54	384
55-64	312
65 and over	211
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
Under $15,000	$158
$15,000-$25,000	271
$25,000-$35,000	359
$35,000-$50,000	405
$50,000 and over	488

*These figures are median planned household expenditures on Christmas gifts for 1990. For each group, half of all households expect to spend more than the figure shown, half intend to spend less.

- The level of spending also varies a good deal by geography. In the Northeast region, the median expenditure runs almost 10 percent above the national average. In the South, it is some 5 percent below the national figure.
- In the Midwest and the West, the level of spending is marginally below the national level.
- Spending for gifts in the Western region is estimated to run at about the same level this year as last year. In the Northeast, however, sales will be over 5 percent below a year ago, primarily because of regional economic difficulties.
- In the South and the Midwest, Christmas sales may be off by as much as 3 to 5 percent as compared with last year.
- Spending plans, of course, increase with earnings. In the $50,000 plus bracket, the median planned expenditure is close to $500.
- For those with incomes of $35,000 to $50,000, typical Christmas spending plans run about $400.

Fabian Linden



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The Conference Board

Serving Business and Society for 75 Years

A Topical Report from the Consumer Research Center October 1991

Special Consumer Survey Report

The Issues of Public Concern: 1991

The Cost of Medical Care, Drug Abuse, and the Federal Budget Deficit top of the list of American public concerns, followed by Crime, Unemployment, and AIDS. Smoking, Race Relations, and the Threat of Nuclear War are regarded as the country's least serious issues. These are the findings of a Conference Board study in which people were asked to indicate the degree of seriousness with which they regard a list of 22 economic and social issues. Survey participants were given five response options, ranging from "most serious" to "least serious." National Family Opinion, Inc. conducted the survey for The Conference Board, based on a representative sample of 5,000 U.S. households.

An identical survey was conducted last year at about this time, in which the same issues were covered. There are some interesting differences between the two studies, both in the relative rank of the issues and in the degree of concern expressed. In the most recent survey, 90 percent of all respondents considered the Cost of Medical Care as a serious problem, up nearly two points from a year ago. Drug Abuse, however, is regarded with slightly less concern than earlier. The Federal Budget Deficit now ranks third in the public's list of concerns, up from fifth place in the year-ago probe. The largest change is in the public's view of Unemployment. This issue has moved up from twelfth to fifth place on the list. In the most recent study, more than 79 percent of all respondents indicated that the jobless problem is serious, up from less than 66 percent a year ago.

The Savings & Loan Crisis is also now regarded with considerably more concern by the public than last time. Currently, 77 percent of all survey respondents regard this to be a serious issue, up from 64 percent last year. This is among the largest changes registered for any of the problems covered. There was also a big rise in the public's concern about the loss of jobs in Manufacturing.

However, a number of problems are now causing somewhat less concern than previously. Pollution was considered to be serious by about 80 percent of the public last year, but now about 72 percent hold this view. The Homeless, and the Cost of Housing are also now regarded with less concern than previously.

There are considerable differences by age. Overall, the level of concern tends to rise with age. However, the differences in view vary considerably according to the particular issue. Those under age 25 are most concerned with Drug Abuse, Crime, AIDS, and Pollution. Also high on their list of worries are the quality of Elementary Education and, to a lesser extent, Unemployment. However, for many of the other items included in the study, young people are less concerned than those who are older. Households headed by persons aged 25-44 also have a high level of uneasiness with the Drug Abuse problem, AIDS, Poverty, Crime, and Pollution. However, highest on their list of worries are the Cost of Medical Care, and the quality of Education. Similarly, these are also the issues which

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provoke the greatest concern among the more mature segments of the population—those in the age group 45-64. Older people, those 65 and over, have similar worries as the rest of the population, but at this age there is considerable concern about the Savings & Loan Crisis, and the Federal Budget Deficit. As would be expected, concern over the Cost of Medical Care is higher than for any other age group.

Similarly, the incidence of concern on most issues runs higher among those with modest incomes than among those that are better off financially. The degree of worry about Medical Care Costs runs considerably higher among those with low incomes than those in the more fortunate earning brackets. Among the other matters which cause low-income families a relatively high level of concern are the Cost of Housing and the Homeless. Understandably, as compared to the population generally, the affluent rate high on their list of concern such economic issues as the Federal Budget Deficit, and the Savings & Loan Crisis. Also, Elementary Education ranks fairly high among those in the top income brackets.

The issues that concern people are generally similar in most geographical regions—the Cost of Medical Care, Drug Abuse, and the Federal Budget Deficit are high on the list in almost all sections of the country. In New England, people are more concerned with Unemployment than in any other area. This issue is also high on the list in the Middle Atlantic region. The Cost of Housing receives a relatively high level of complaints in the Pacific states.

Many of the nation's problems are regarded as serious by almost all constituencies of the country. The rich and the poor, the young and the old, from the Eastern seabord to the Pacific coast, consider the rising costs of medical care as the nation's worst problem. There is also almost universal uneasiness with our ever-larger Federal Budget Deficit, with crime in the streets, and with drug abuse. These are problems which are likely to increasingly become major issues of the national political debate.

Fabian Linden

THE DEGREES OF PUBLIC CONCERN

Here are a number of economic and social issues which are causing many people concerm. How would you rate the seriousness of each one of these issues as compared to the others?

Survey Conducted 1991

	Most Serious ←				→ *Least Serious*	*Serious Concern**	
						1991	*1990*
	Percent of Respondents					*Percent*	
Cost of Medical Care	65.1	24.6	8.3	1.4	0.6	**89.7**	88.4
Drug Abuse	55.7	27.6	12.5	2.9	1.3	**83.3**	88.2
Federal Budget Deficit	52.7	28.0	15.5	2.8	1.0	**80.7**	78.2
Crime	46.8	33.2	16.9	2.4	0.7	**80.0**	81.2
Unemployment	46.7	32.6	16.5	3.6	0.7	**79.3**	65.8
AIDS	57.5	21.0	13.0	4.5	3.9	**78.5**	77.5
S & L Crisis	45.2	31.3	17.3	4.8	1.4	**76.5**	63.4
Elementary Education	43.8	30.2	19.1	5.1	1.8	**74.0**	74.2
Loss of Jobs in Mfg.	38.9	34.4	21.2	4.3	1.2	**73.3**	63.4
Poverty	47.2	25.8	18.6	6.3	2.1	**73.0**	70.8
Pollution	38.2	34.0	21.0	5.2	1.5	**72.2**	79.5
The Homeless	44.8	24.6	18.6	8.9	3.2	**69.4**	72.1
Alcoholism	37.8	29.3	22.0	8.4	2.5	**67.1**	70.4
Foreign Trade Deficit	28.7	35.8	26.9	5.9	2.8	**64.5**	64.5
Cost of Housing	27.7	32.8	28.6	8.2	2.6	**60.5**	66.1
Plight of Farmers	27.9	31.6	26.9	9.9	3.6	**59.5**	62.8
White Collar Crime	25.7	32.6	28.0	10.7	2.9	**58.3**	57.8
Higher Education	23.4	32.0	31.2	9.6	3.7	**55.4**	55.3
Child Care Facilities	24.8	27.3	30.5	11.7	5.7	**52.1**	52.5
Smoking	25.8	22.7	27.3	13.4	10.9	**48.5**	51.2
Race Relations	21.2	24.6	32.7	14.1	7.4	**45.8**	43.8
Threat of Nuclear War	10.7	14.6	24.9	26.2	23.7	**25.3**	26.0

* *This measure is the proportion of respondents indicating either Most Serious (first column) or Least Serious (second column).*

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The Conference Board

A Topical Report from the Consumer Research Center — December 1991

Special Consumer Survey Report

Christmas 1991 Spending Plans Lower Than Last Year

Consumer spending for Christmas 1991 is likely to fall short of the lackluster levels of last year. Based on a survey conducted by the Consumer Research Center of The Conference Board, the average U.S. household expects to spend about $375 on Christmas gifts this year. This is estimated to add up to a total of close to $36 billion, which is about 3 percent less than the estimate made last year, based on an identical survey.

The more modest plans for Christmas spending are not unexpected. The prevailing economic environment is less positive than last year at this time—Gross National Product is lower, the unemployment rate is higher, and consumers are considerably less comfortable with the prevailing state of the economy. However, as we move closer to Christmas, the gift-giving spirit may become somewhat more generous. Still, this year compared with last year, there will be substantially fewer shopping days between Thanksgiving and Christmas—26 days, compared with 32, a difference of nearly 20 percent.

The survey of Christmas spending plans, covering a nationwide sample of 5,000 households, was conducted for the Board in November by National Family Opinion, Inc., of Toledo, Ohio. Among other survey findings:

- Well over a third of the nation's households intend to spend less than $200 for Christmas gifts this year.
- About two out of every five households have a gift budget of between $200 and $500.
- Roughly one out of every four homes report that they will spend over $500 for Christmas gifts. They will account for somewhat over half of all Christmas spending.
- Households headed by persons age 45-54 have the highest spending plans. This is the most affluent age group; also, in many families children are still present.
- Those aged 55-64 also have above-average spending plans. Here, we have many couples who are already grandparents.

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- There are some fairly large differences by region of the country.
- In the Northeast, the Season's gift budget runs fairly well above average, though somewhat lower than a year ago.
- In the Midwest, the level of intended spending is close to the all-country average. This is the only region where Christmas spending plans are above a year ago.
- While intended Christmas spending in the West is slightly above the U.S. average, gift budgets are lower than those of last year.
- In the South, where household income tends to be below par, planned outlays are modest, and quite a bit lower than a year ago.
- Evidently, plans to spend rise with income. Households in the $50,000-and-over income bracket account for about 25 percent of all homes, but an estimated 40 percent of total planned Christmas spending.

Fabian Linden

*How much will you be spending on gifts this Christmas?**

TOTAL U.S.	**$375**
REGION	
Northeast	$422
Midwest	$376
South	$351
West	$382
AGE OF HOUSEHOLD HEAD	
Under 25	$386
25-34	$384
35-44	$393
45-54	$466
55-64	$402
65 and Over	$293
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
Under $15,000	$181
$15,000-$25,000	$274
$25,000-$35,000	$386
$35,000-$50,000	$470
$50,000 and over	$590

* Figures represent average planned household expenditures on Christmas gifts for 1991.

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Serving Business and Society Since 1916

A Topical Report from the Consumer Research Center May 1992

Special Consumer Survey Report

Living Standards: Boomers and Their Parents

It is an increasingly fashionable view among many of the nation's social commentators that the baby boom generation — today's young adults — are not doing as well economically, and are not likely to do as well as their parents. We frequently encounter the notion that the "American Dream" is becoming only a dream. Today's young, we are told, cannot realistically maintain the same ambitious expectations of their parents' generation. Such warnings have increased in intensity as the economy has weakened, lending seeming credibility to the view that our future may not be as prosperous as our past.

How accurate are these disconcerting observations of the changing American scene? The ultimate authority on this question is not the sociologist, but the general public. To that end, the Conference Board conducted a survey that asked people to compare their present economic circumstances with those of their parents during the last years that they were still living in their parents' home. In addition, respondents were asked to compare their personal opportunities with those of their parents when their parents were at the same age. Last, they were asked whether they thought that their children would eventually achieve the same standard of living as their own. The survey, conducted for the Conference Board by NFO Research Inc. of Toledo, Ohio, covered a representative national sample of 5,000 households.

On the first question, how people compare their present standard of living with that of their parents during the last years in which they were living at home, 63 percent say they are better off than their parents. For men, the ratio is somewhat higher, for women somewhat lower. There are also differences by age. Among males under age 35, about 46 percent report that their conditions are better than those of their parents; for women the figure is 37 percent. Slightly fewer than 25 percent of young men say their living standards are not as good as those of their parents. For women, the figure is only marginally higher. Of course, it must be kept in mind that these are young persons still early in their careers, while in their last years living at home their parents were in their peak earning years. Further along in the age scale, significantly more people feel that they are living better than their parents.

On the question of how Americans compare their own opportunities with those of their fathers and mothers at the same age, responses were strongly positive in all age groups, and particularly among women. Overall, almost 70 percent of men feel they have greater opportunities than their fathers had, and more than 75 percent of women say they enjoy more opportunities than their mothers did. These figures increase slightly with the age of the respondent.

Finally, on the question of whether today's parents believe that their children will achieve a standard of living in their lives comparable to their own, 55 percent say they expect their offspring to have better living standards. This, broadly, is the view of all age groups.

In brief, a majority of Americans today feel that their standard of living and their opportunities are better than those of their parents. They also expect that their children will, or already have, exceeded their own accomplishments. A close look at the facts confirms these general perceptions. For example, today, about one in three men aged 35 has earned a college degree, but in their fathers' generation, the figure was only about one out of six. Among women, the gain is even greater. One out of every four young adult women hold a college degree, compared with only one in ten in their mothers' generation. Furthermore, today the average income of young families aged 25-35 is a real 40 percent higher than thirty years ago, when their parents were that age. More broadly, over that time period the nation's per capita disposable income has nearly doubled.

We may be dreaming less, but we are accomplishing more.

Fabian Linden

How would you compare your present standard of living with that of your parents during the last few years that you were living at home?

	Age of Household Head					
	Total	*Under 35*	*35-44*	*45-54*	*55-64*	*65 & Over*
			Percent of Male Respondents			
Better	64.9	46.4	56.9	72.2	74.3	80.6
Same	22.0	30.6	27.4	16.3	17.7	14.9
Worse	13.1	23.0	15.7	11.5	8.0	4.5
			Percent of Female Respondents			
Better	61.7	37.3	54.0	67.2	74.7	78.8
Same	23.7	36.0	26.0	19.6	18.3	16.7
Worse	14.6	26.7	20.0	13.2	7.0	4.5

Do you feel that you have greater or fewer opportunities than your father/mother had when he/she was about your age?

	Age of Household Head					
	Total	*Under 35*	*35-44*	*45-54*	*55-64*	*65 & Over*
			Percent of Male Respondents			
Greater	68.7	60.1	66.5	70.1	74.0	75.4
Same	14.6	19.0	11.1	13.6	13.6	15.3
Fewer	16.7	20.9	22.4	16.4	12.4	9.3
			Percent of Female Respondents			
Greater	76.5	73.5	77.7	78.1	77.9	76.2
Same	13.7	16.0	10.4	13.5	12.5	15.8
Fewer	9.7	10.4	11.9	8.4	9.7	8.0

Do you believe that your children will achieve a standard of living in their lifetime that will be better, the same or worse than you will have achieved in your lifetime?

	Age of Household Head					
	Total	*Under 35*	*35-44*	*45-54*	*55-64*	*65 & Over*
			Percent of Total Respondents			
Better	54.6	52.6	51.0	50.1	55.0	62.5
Same	29.9	32.5	30.4	30.4	30.5	26.1
Worse	15.5	14.9	18.5	19.5	14.4	11.4

Source:
NFO Research, Inc.

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A Topical Report From the Consumer Research Center **October 1992**

Special Consumer Survey Report

Value for the Dollar

- Foods bought for home consumption — poultry, fruits, vegetables, meat — are perceived by the nation's consumers to give good value for money spent. Fast foods, however, are considered to provide relatively poor value for money.
- Good value ratings are also given to video tape rentals, TV sets, household appliances, and telephone and electric services.
- Premium pay television, hospital costs, health insurance, credit card charges, lawyers' fees, cable TV, and movie admissions are rated as giving exceptionally low value by consumers.
- Repair services are generally considered to be too costly for the work done.

These are some of the findings reported from a survey conducted for The Conference Board by National Family Opinion (NFO), Inc., of Greenwich, Conn. The survey was based on a representative sample of U.S. households. Consumers were asked to assess the value received for the money spent for 50 different goods and services. The sample was divided into two equal groups. Each group was queried on half of the items included in the survey. Participants were given three response options — "good," "average" or "poor" value. Over 150,000 item evaluations were received from more than 6,500 participating households. In developing the list of items included, representative goods and services were selected from every major category of consumer expenditures: food, clothing, home furnishings and maintenance, transportation, medical and personal care, recreation, and financial and legal services.

It is not realistic to compute an appraisal of the overall level of consumer satisfaction since the various items included in the survey are not weighted in accordance with their relative importance in the family's total market basket.

It should also be cautioned that the patterns of inflation are a significant factor affecting the consumer's perception of value. It is evidently not possible for consumers to make an objective assessment of the "fair" dollar value of any item. Accordingly, when the price for any particular item rises rapidly in a relatively short period, consumers feel they are getting less value for their money.

"How do you rate the value you get for your money when you purchase each of the following items?"

Product	*Good*	*Average*	*Poor*	*Composite Rating**
Foods				
Meat	28.8%	60.6%	10.6%	59.1
Fish	24.5%	58.3%	17.2%	53.7
Poultry	46.4%	47.9%	5.8%	70.3
Fast Foods	14.5%	57.2%	28.3%	43.1
Restaurant Meals	22.1%	63.3%	14.5%	53.8
Fruits, Vegetables	36.0%	54.4%	9.6%	63.2
Apparel				
Men's Apparel	18.4%	65.1%	16.5%	50.9
Women's Apparel	18.2%	59.8%	22.0%	48.1
Dry Cleaning	15.9%	56.3%	27.8%	44.1
Shoes	21.2%	60.5%	18.2%	51.4
Home Furnishings & Equipment				
TV Set	32.0%	61.5%	6.4%	62.8
Appliances	25.5%	65.8%	8.7%	58.4
Furniture	15.5%	63.9%	20.5%	47.5
Carpets	15.3%	70.5%	14.2%	50.6
Home Services & Utilities				
Appliance Repairs	10.5%	50.9%	38.6%	36.0
Telephone Service	31.6%	51.8%	16.6%	57.5
Electricity	29.6%	52.4%	18.0%	55.8
Home Repairs	12.0%	54.4%	33.7%	39.2
Transportation / Travel				
Mass Transit	13.0%	55.3%	31.7%	40.6
Cars (U.S.)	20.2%	54.0%	25.7%	47.2
Cars (Foreign)	22.3%	53.3%	24.4%	48.9
Auto Repairs	13.0%	47.2%	39.7%	36.7
Air Fares	10.3%	55.8%	33.9%	38.2
Hotel Stays	9.2%	59.9%	30.9%	39.1
Used Cars	9.2%	56.9%	34.0%	37.7
Auto Insurance	9.7%	46.1%	44.2%	32.8
Car Rental	9.6%	60.4%	29.9%	39.8
Medical Care				
Doctors' Fees	9.5%	44.1%	46.5%	31.5
Dentists' Fees	9.5%	47.3%	43.2%	33.1
Hospital Charges	4.8%	30.6%	64.6%	20.1
Health Insurance	9.6%	35.2%	55.2%	27.2
Prescription Drugs	21.7%	39.2%	39.1%	41.3
Personal Care				
Personal Care	17.9%	68.1%	13.9%	52.0
Haircuts	30.2%	54.4%	15.5%	57.4
Eyeglasses	19.4%	52.8%	27.8%	45.8
Contact Lenses	14.4%	58.2%	27.4%	43.5
Life Insurance	10.4%	60.0%	29.6%	40.4
Finance / Legal Charges				
Lawyers' Fees	4.6%	35.6%	59.8%	22.4
Bank Service Fees	9.8%	41.7%	48.5%	30.7
Credit Card Fees	5.6%	33.6%	60.8%	22.4
Recreation				
Videotape Rental	36.4%	54.2%	9.3%	63.5
Movies at Theatres	7.8%	43.1%	49.1%	29.4
Cable TV	8.9%	39.8%	51.3%	28.8
Premium Pay TV	3.8%	31.5%	64.7%	19.6
Compact Discs	11.0%	65.0%	24.1%	43.5
Adm. Sports Events	4.6%	44.1%	51.3%	26.7
Other Items				
Pet Food	27.5%	61.0%	11.5%	58.0
Children's Toys	10.3%	55.3%	34.4%	38.0
U.S. Postage	17.9%	49.9%	32.2%	42.9
College Tuition	8.6%	43.5%	47.8%	30.3

* The Composite Rating equals the percentage of "Good" replies plus one-half the percentage of "Average" replies for an item.

The survey results were tabulated by age, household income, and region. The findings of this effort are not particularly enlightening — there seem to be faint differences in the way the various age segments of the population assess the various goods and services. In fact, the findings fail to document some prevailing notions. The elderly, it is widely assumed, tend to be more critical, but the survey's findings do not confirm this general assumption. There are few significant differences by age for most of the items included in the survey.

There is also very little difference in the general degree of satisfaction according to earning bracket. Nor are there significant differences by geographical region.

Here is a category-by-category summary of survey results:

Food. Fresh food generally receives a high rating by consumers. A very high proportion of respondents, close to one out of every two, consider poultry to be a "good buy." Meat and fish rate somewhat lower. Fresh fruits and vegetables are considered to be a good value by well over a third of all consumers. Fresh produce receives a particularly positive rating from those in the more affluent earning brackets, probably because of the higher level of education. This category also receives a strong endorsement from those in the Pacific region. Restaurant meals are given a moderately favorable assessment, but fast foods are rated a good deal less positively, particularly by those in the higher earning brackets. However, they are somewhat more popular among the elderly.

Apparel. The average American considers most apparel purchases as providing reasonable value. Men's clothing receives a somewhat higher rating than women's apparel. Shoes are also regarded as providing even better value for money. On all three items, some three-fifths of consumers feel they get "average" value. The young tend to give apparel items a somewhat more positive rating than the elderly. There is very little difference in how such merchandise is assessed by income level. Dry cleaning services are viewed less favorably than apparel products.

Home Furnishings & Equipment. Most of the products in this category receive positive assessments by consumers. TV sets get exceptionally high marks — about a third of all consumers feel that they get good value, and an additional 60 percent feel they get fair value. Appliances receive almost as positive a grade. However, furniture and carpets fare less well. Still, roughly two-thirds of all respondents feel that both these

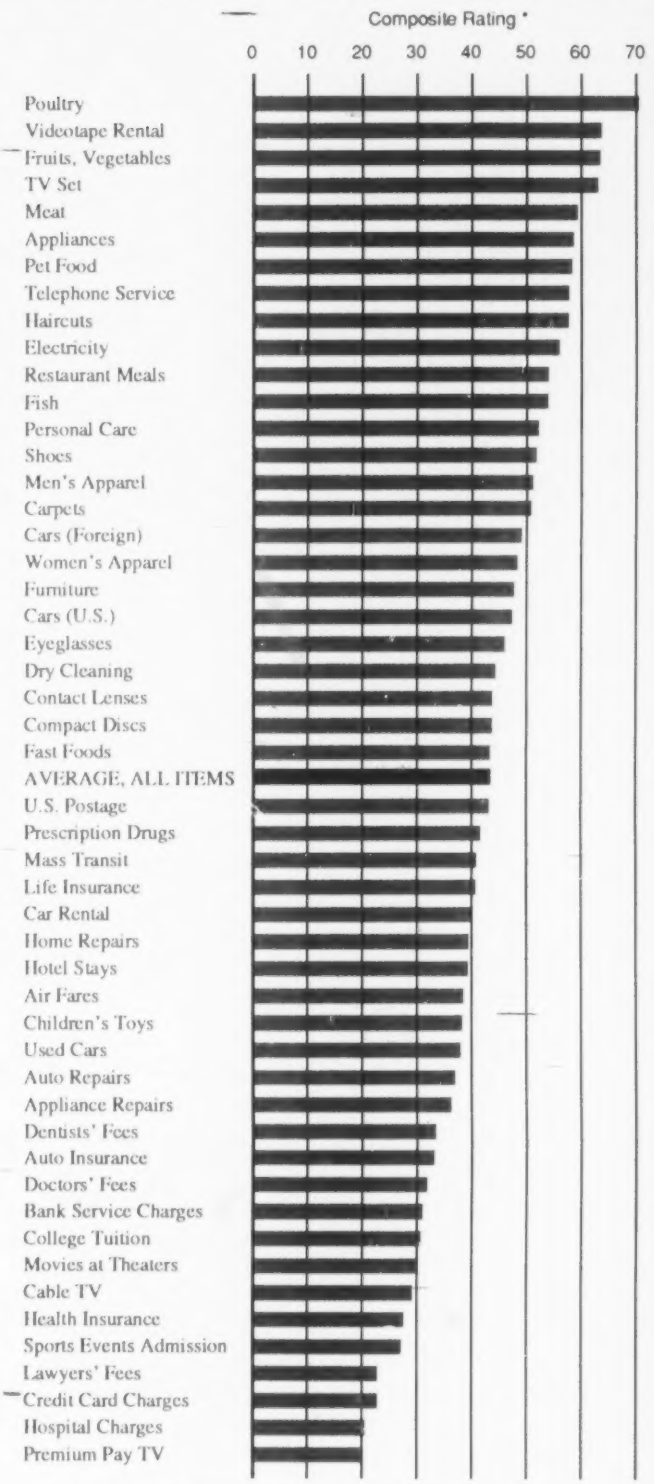
products provide normal value for money spent. There appear to be very few differences in how this broad category is assessed by age, income level or region.

Home Services, Utilities. In this broad category, telephone services receive an exceptionally good rating, as do the services provided by local electric companies — both are viewed as "good" values by about 30 percent of respondents, while only slightly more than half as many rate these services as "poor." The assessment here improves markedly with age but declines with income. However, home repairs and appliance repairs receive more negative assessments. In both cases, over a third of those surveyed consider such services as providing poor value for the money spent.

Transportation. The average family gives the American-made automobile a reasonably positive grade. Some 20 percent of all survey participants believe that they receive good value for money in buying an American model automobile. Foreign cars get a moderately higher rating of 22 percent. The young and the affluent tend to prefer foreign cars, while those who are no longer young and those with modest incomes are more favorably disposed to American-made models. Foreign automobiles are substantially more popular in the Pacific region, while cars made in the United States are preferred in the Midwestern states. Used cars, however, are considered a good buy by only about one out of every ten consumers, while more than one in three feel that they provide "poor" value. Similarly, about three times as many consumers believe that automobile rentals and hotel stays constitute poor value for money spent as the number that grade them as providing good value. The automobile insurance industry receives an even more unfavorable assessment. Consumers are also very critical of the value received for air fares. Close to 35 percent give this industry a "poor" rating, only 10 percent a positive assessment. However, older people give air fares slightly more favorable grades.

Medical & Personal Care. Medical care charges represent the major issue of consumer discontent. More than two out of every five survey respondents believe that they receive poor value from doctors and dentists, less than 10 percent believe that their money is well spent for such services. Two out of every three survey respondents are highly critical of hospital charges. The health insurance industry receives almost as negative a rating. In purchasing prescription drugs, only one out of every five consumers believes that they receive good value, while twice as many believe they receive poor value. Life insurance receives a similarly low rating. Medical services — doctors, dentists, medical insurance, etc. — tend to be assessed somewhat less negatively by the elderly. However, those over 65 give prescription drugs, as well as optometric products, lower grades than the young.

The Degree of Consumer Acceptance



* For definition of Composite Rating, see footnote to table.

Financial & Legal Charges. All the services included in this designation receive extremely negative ratings. Lawyer's fees receive particularly low marks. Some 60 percent of all survey respondents feel that they receive poor service for the money spent on legal help. Credit card charges are given just about the same negative assessment. Banks are also considered to provide poor value for their service charges. Almost half of respondents express this view; only one in ten gives this industry a good grade. The elderly give financial services a somewhat more positive rating than younger respondents.

Recreation. Goods and services in the entertainment category are given mixed reviews. Videotape rentals rate very high on the consumer's list — over 35 percent of respondents say they offer "good" value, compared with less than 10 percent who say "poor." Admissions to movie theaters, in contrast, are given a grade of "poor" by nearly half of those surveyed. Among the lowest readings of all the goods and services included in this survey, cable television charges and premium pay television are considered to be "poor" buys by more than half of all survey participants. Most consumers say that compact discs offer reasonable value. They are ranked close to the middle of the list. For most of these items, there are only minor differences by age and income bracket.

Other Items. Close to half of all consumers feel that they receive poor value for college tuition costs. Roughly one out of every three citizens feels that they receive poor value from the U.S. Post Office. Children's toys receive a comparable rating. However, most pet owners report that their dogs and cats gleefully wag their tails when served their branded pet foods.

Fabian Linden

Detailed Survey results by demographic characteristics and major geographical regions are available to members of The Conference Board's Consumer Research Center upon request.

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